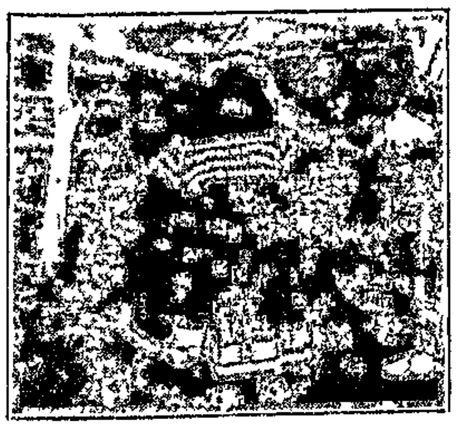
Story of the Bear Dance and the Crazy Ute.



Daughter of Jane Redjacket

The real significance of a Bear Dance is vague in the minds of a great many people. Some say it signifies one thing and 'some another. According to the best information it is certainly a religious ceremony It would be no news to tell the readers of this paper that most all the people of all the world, since God said, "Let there be light," have worshiped some kind of a supreme being and have believed in a future existence. The story of the Indian's Happy Hunting ground has often been told to the younsters in school and around the fire side. The savage Indian of today has the same ideas of the future as did the savage Indians who greeted Columbus more than 400 years ago. He knows no more now than he knew then.

The season prior to the Bear dance corresponds to the Lenten season observed by the churches. The celebration of the Bear dance doubtless means the same thing to the Indians as the celebration of Easter means to the members of the Christian churches who celebrate the occasion in commemoration of Christ's resurrection. The ancients had among their many gods and goddesses a goddess of light and spring, Eastre, in honor of whom a festival was celebrated in April and this month was called Eastermonao.

The generally accepted significance of the Bear dance is that it is the celebration of the breaking up of winter, the coming of spring, the resurrection of the sleeping vegetation The time when all the world is glad. When the buds sprout forth, when the buttercups and daisies peep up out of the earth and are kissed into freshness and beauty of life by the warm lips of the affectionate sun. When the birds begin to mate and build their nests in tree tops where the young are to be hatched. The Indian knows that when the bear comes out of his long wintry sleep and roams forth, that there is grass soon coming for his pony and that the antelope, deer and elk are making ready to leave the bad lands where scrub cedars abound for the parks where the carpets of green spread out along the banks of the Watauga, which in the Indian vernacular means beautiful river.

For thirty years the people of this valley have been attending these Bear dances at Whiterocks and they still delight in the weird, odd festival. Nearly all last week Vernal presented the appearance of a "deserted village" and the surrounding country was almost depopulated, so many were they who went to the Bear dance And those who have witnessed it so many times seemed to enjoy it just as much as ever

Watch the dance ten minutes and you have seen all there is to see. But there are other sights than the dance more interesting The gaudy appearance of bucks and squaws, the unique musical instruments And the toggery that they do wear. Anything from a feather to a mirror is used to decorate the loud clothing. Beads and shells till further orders. One Indian was dressed up in such a style as to resemble an eagle, wings tail and all To appreciate the costumes these people wear you must go take a look at them for yourself:

The dance takes place on a small patch of ground enclosed by a brush fence. There are two lines of dancers, in one line the squaws and in the other line the bucks, facing one another. Nearby stands a big buck, whip in hand, to keep them in proper positions Now everything is ready for the dance to begin But wait till we tell you about those musicians and that music, if you care to call it music, and you will not after you have heard it. The orchestra is composed of about fifteen or twenty of the most talented men of the tribe. A large piece of tin or zinc is so placed as to sound as much like a busted drum as possible. In one hand the musician holds the end of a stick on which is carved a series of notches. The other end rests on the tin or zinc. Across this stick the artist draws a shin bone of some animal and the noise that issues from those instruments would make night hideous, but it is music to the ears of those reds of the forest. And all the time that the sound goes forth it blends itself with a weird chant that the musicians sing as they draw the shin bones across the sticks that have notches carved on them. The dance consists of two steps forward and three steps back. The man with the whip is there in reaching distance and it is woe to the laggard, a sting for the man behind This celebration continues for one week, usually during the morning hours until the last day and then it is day all day in the day time and there is no night for the Utes. The festival winds up with the big feed and the bill of fare includes everything from roast beef to dog, but it is mostly dog, some say.

Do the whites take part in the dance? Of course they do. They would not consider the trip complete without that. From the white men the squaws collect a toll in any amount from a nickel up.

The Bear Dance in Progress

On the last day just before the big feast the bear comes out to tell them that the winter is over and that the spring has come. A big Indian covered over with a bear skin, is the bear.

Thought It Was A Navajo.

When the news reached Vernal a few months ago that Henry Jim, one of the leading Ute Indians of the Whiterocks agency, had dropped dead at the sight of a monkey, no one believed it, but a thorough investigation has proven that it was true. The people of Vernal will remember that George Adams brought "Happy," an ugly brute, home with him from Salt Lake last fall After a little while Mr. Adams sold "Happy" to Billy Preece, who in turn gave the "missing link" to Mr. Green, of the government service at Ft. Duchesne. One day Henry Jim was out hunting and one of the things that he saw was "Happy," the first monkey he had ever laid his eyes on. Naturally he was frightened half out of his wits. He thought it was a Navajo who had committed some crime and whom the gods had turned into a thing like that to punish it. He took several shots at the little beast, one of which pierced the shoulder. "Happy" let a yell out of him which sounded half human and half demon and dodged behind boulders and sage brush, all the time winking and blinking those restless and terrible eyes Another shot and the little fellow jumped high into a tree Henry Jim took to his heels and fairly flew from the presence of such a monster.

Next day an inquiry was sent out to the Navajoes in Southern Utah to ascertain if any of their tribe was missing. Word soon came back that they were all at home. Then Henry Jim persuaded an Indian friend of his to accompany him to the place where he had the encounter with what he still insisted was the Navajo which had been converted into a demon by the Gods. "Happy" saw the two of them before they saw him and made a long leap for a tree. The monkey made a motion with his right hand at the same time screaming out to Henry Jim, "the other day you tried to get me, now I am going to get you," and he jumped on the Indian's shoulder. Henry Jim dropped dead in his tracks.

There is still another version as to how the Indian met his death, which sounds more mysterious than the above J. H. Coltharp says that the Indians interpreted certain movements of the monkey to mean Navajo signs The monkey rubbed his hand across his forehead, which in Navajo means "I am pretty mad." Then he placed his hand over his heart That sign in Navajo means "You hurt me here" Mr Coltharp says the monkey was sitting on a hay stack, and not in a tree, when he made the sign to Henry Jim

The Medicine Man.

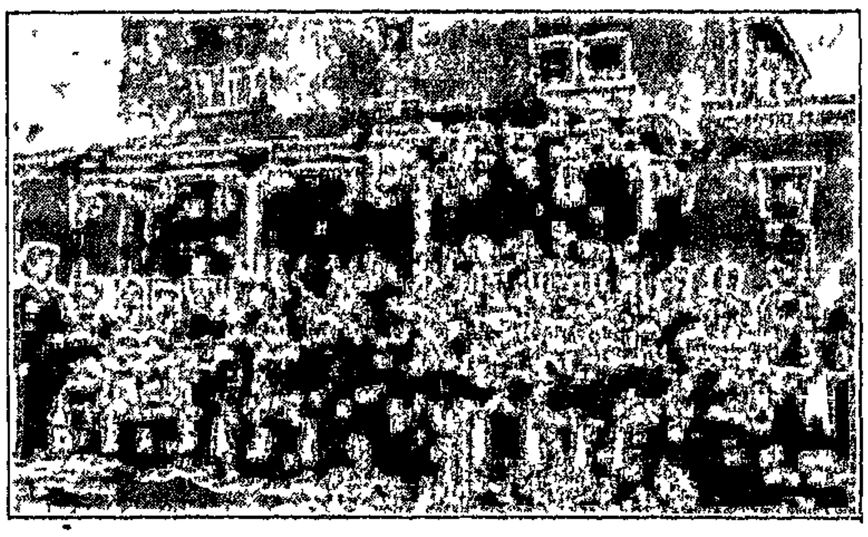
The Indians still practice the medicine act on their sick This practice is as old as the Indians are Their medicine man says all kinds of weird words in a strange tongue and lays on hands with fearful violence The performance always takes place at night time and often lasts until away in the morning. All the relatives of the patient and many others gather around. They chant and pow-wow and go through curious motions The doctor resorts to various tricks which he calls making medicine. He picks up a stone and swallows it After awhile he belches it up Then he hurls it with all his might towards a star. If he hits the star all right. If he misses the star all right. Many other maneuvers he goes through with. The doctor charges all the way from a few cents to an Indian pony for his services. Last week one of the Ouray Indian pupils at the school at Whiterocks was sick with pneumonia The parents, a medicine man and a band of the Ouray Indians went up to Whiterocks and demanded the pupil from the school in order to do the medicine stunt over him and cure him Capt C G Hall, the Indian agent refused to allow the child taken from the school and the Indians declared they would take him by force They had not more than reached the school house when a troop of cavalry from Fort Duchesne, arrived in sight, in response to a hurry up call from Captain Hall The Ourays decided that the child would get well without the aid of the medicine man.

The Crazy Indian.

Over at the Indian Agency at Whiterocks, on the former Uintah Indian Reservation, there is an Indian who has not slept in a house nor on a bed for more than forty years Captain Pardon Dodds, who was Indian Agent at Whiterocks in 1887, and who is now living at Vernal will vouch for the truthfulness of this statement. Peter Dillman, the man who took part in the rescue of the wife and daughter of the massacred Meeker, at Meeker, Colo, when they were in captivity of the Ute Indians will also declare that the story is a true one. There are many other men in this Ashley valley and elsewhere in Utah, who will give the same testimony if called upon. For more than forty years this Indian, whose name is "Inepegant," has not only slept in the open, with the earth for a bed, the sky for a covering and the gray rocks and scrubby cedars for companions, but he has worn no clothes He must be about sixty years old, as Captain Dodds says he appeared to be twenty when he began his strange life within a stone's throw of the agency. He was one of the most agile and handsome bucks of all the Ute tribe at that time The sparkle of his eye is still bright and his long hair is yet coal black, though his body is weak and wasting away and his face carries on it the stamp of death. At least as much of it as one can see, as it is covered with a long growth of grizzly beard, unkempt and dirty. His skin, exposed to nearly half a century of all kinds of weather, resembles that of an elephant more than anything else.

For miles and miles around he is called the "Crazy Indian" and people travel from far and near to get a look at him Tourists go out of their way for a glimpse of him and then can hardly believe their eyes when they gaze at the awful thing. The statement that he is insane has been doubted The tales that have been told as to why he sits there, from one Bear dance to another and from one Sun dance to another, winter and summer in daylight and darkness, in winter hovering over a few smouldering embers, not enough to keep one hand warm, have been many. One thing is certain, he is doing penance for some crime He is abiding by the Indian law, which provides that the criminal must be banished into the land where the coyote and wild cat roam and where human foot seldom trods, except, as in this case, out of mere curiosity.

One story has it that he killed his mother in a fit of passion more than forty years ago. But that story is stoutly denied by his brother, "Provo Dick" who lives near Whiterocks. "Heap big lie" asserts "Provo Dick"



School Children at Whiterocks Agency.

Crazy Indian

"No killum mother. She died a natural death, Dick declares, and he helped heap the blankets and sticks over the handful of dirt that hides her from the sun.

The story that "Provo Dick" tells is perhaps the true one. "Inepegant," his brother, would never associate with the young squaws of his tribe nor of other tribes, though they were lithesome and good to look at, and many tried in vain to get a pleasant look or a kind word from him because he was tall, athletic, handsome and brave. He was a leader in all the wars with whites and had more scalps to his belt than most other young bucks of his band. He wanted no squaw. He was infatued with the white girls and vowed that he would have one for a wife. One day he and his band captured a family of whites en route from New England to California. The father and mother were killed, the two brothers escaped and the beautiful daughter was kidnaped and carried to the mountains, miles and miles from human habitation The two brothers returned to the scene and found the dead bodies of their parents, but the sister, dead nor alive, was to be found They started out on what seemed to be a hopeless search. Soon, to their great joy they were on the trail and for days they followed it. Here and there was an Indian sign and once in a great while they discovered a piece of their sister's shawl, and they knew she expected them to rescue her. As the sun was sinking behind the hills they saw in the distance, an Indian and a white girl It was "Inepegant" and their sister The Indian realized that he was about to be caught Rather than let the white men have the woman he wanted to marry he murdered her and took her scalp before their very eyes He fled in the gathering dusk and was absent from his home for many weeks The dead girl was buried by the side of the lonely trail

When the Sun dance began at the agency in the summer time the handsome buck began dancing penance While other Utes were marching around the pole looking at the sky chanting the weird strange words of worship he was away off at the foot of the Uintah mountains alone with his sin and his punishment In the years gone by he had won the titles of the medicine man for his long endurance dancing around the pole, having defeated the many strong bucks who were stretched out exhausted in the sweltering sun. Now some other would carry off the honors.

Then they began to call him the "Crazy Indian." Then they began to wonder what awful crime he had committed. He told the story to his brothers All the Utes soon knew what was the matter. He was shunned by everybody, as if he was a leper. For days he had nothing to eat, and then when the darkness fell upon the earth he

(on fourth page)

School Boys Band at Agency